

Assignment pay for Houston bilingual officers
(SB 1483 by Whitmire/A. Luna)

DIGEST: SB 1483 would have added bilingual police and fire department personnel to the list of city of Houston workers who could receive assignment pay. The assignment pay would have been compensation for performing specialized functions as interpreters or translators.

GOVERNOR'S
REASON
FOR VETO:

This is a local issue. The Legislature should not require local governments like the city of Houston to authorize supplemental compensation for bilingual personnel, particularly in view of the fact that supplemental pay for bomb squad personnel, dive team personnel, helicopter personnel, motorcycle personnel, and special weapons and tactics personnel is discretionary with the city.

RESPONSE:

Sen. John Whitmire, the author of SB 1483, said that in as large and diverse a community as Houston there is a serious need for officers fluent in languages like Spanish and Vietnamese, particularly in life and death matters. The bill would have provided some incentive to attract qualified personnel to such duties.

"I believe Doc Arnold, the city of Houston's lobbyist, used his contacts in the governor's office to get this bill vetoed," Sen. Whitmire said. He added that the bill represented part of an agreement worked out with the city of Houston in 1985 concerning bilingual officers; four years later Houston has still not lived up to its agreement.

NOTES:

SB 1483 passed in the House on the Consent Calendar and was not analyzed in a Daily Floor Report.